



THE HISTORY OF CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN AND THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA AND THE SWISS CONFEDERATION (1991–1994)

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 11 th March 2026 Accepted: 10 th April 2026	<p>This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the history of cultural and artistic cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Austria and the Swiss Confederation. The study examines the initial cultural interactions established in the early 1990s within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as well as initiatives proposed by Austria and the development of applied arts and exhibition activities with Switzerland, which contributed to the formation of cultural diplomacy.</p> <p>The research also explores the development of cultural relations at both institutional and individual levels, particularly through the activities of Chingiz Aitmatov, the participation of folk artisans in the international arena, and the entry of handicraft products into European markets. The findings demonstrate that cooperation with Austria and Switzerland played a significant role in Uzbekistan's integration into the global cultural space.</p>
Keywords: Switzerland, Austria, cultural cooperation, cultural diplomacy, CIS, folk applied arts, international exhibitions, cultural exchange, national identity, Chingiz Aytmatov	

INTRODUCTION

The profound transformations in the system of international relations at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century accelerated the integration of newly independent states into the global community. After gaining independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted a multi-vector foreign policy approach, placing particular emphasis on developing cooperation with European countries. In this context, cultural and artistic relations with Austria and Switzerland became one of the key strategic directions.

Austria, as a country with a rich cultural heritage, occupies a prominent place in global art, music, and cultural life. Switzerland, on the other hand, stands out as a country with well-developed cultural industries, international exhibitions, and creative projects. Therefore, cooperation with these countries provided Uzbekistan not only with opportunities for cultural exchange but also with a platform to promote its national culture internationally.

The cultural initiatives launched in the early 1990s within the CIS framework gradually evolved into direct bilateral cooperation with Austria and Switzerland, acquiring a systematic and multifaceted character. Cultural diplomacy, folk applied arts, literature, and the activities of creative individuals became key components of this process.

This article analyzes the historical development of Uzbekistan's cultural cooperation with Austria and Switzerland based on archival sources and practical examples.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the course of this research, historical and comparative analysis, chronological comparison, objectivity principles, and a comprehensive methodological approach were employed to study Uzbekistan's cultural cooperation with the Republic of Austria and the Swiss Confederation.

The role and significance of state, non-state, and international institutions and organizations in establishing and developing interstate cultural relations were examined based on periodical publications, scientific works, dissertations, and archival documents. Furthermore, changes in Uzbekistan's economic opportunities and investment potential, particularly in the context of Central Asia, were analyzed through comparative statistical data before and after the establishment of cooperation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Cooperation with Austria: Cultural cooperation significantly contributes to strengthening friendship and mutual understanding between states. The development of cultural relations enables the



promotion of national cultural values, the exchange of experience across various forms of art, and ultimately enhances cultural progress.

Austria, as a country with a rich cultural heritage, has strong potential for developing close cultural ties with Uzbekistan. This is evidenced by several factors: Salzburg, the birthplace of the great composer Mozart, is a year-round cultural tourism center; Graz was designated the "European Capital of Culture" in 2003; Linz received the same title in 2009; and Vienna has been recognized as a "cultural metropolis of Europe." [1;P. 23,27,31,35;]

Cultural cooperation between Austria and Uzbekistan initially developed within the framework of the CIS. In 1993, a children's art exhibition was organized as part of the activities of the Austria-CIS Friendship Society. During the same year, art historians Professor H. Fritz and academic artist H. Lyuber worked in Yekaterinburg, while three art historians from Yekaterinburg visited Feldkirch (Vorarlberg). [2;]

These events represent the early stages of cultural cooperation between Austria and CIS countries, including Uzbekistan. Archival documents indicate that cooperation was primarily initiated through cultural and artistic activities, particularly children's creativity and artistic exchange. This demonstrates that cultural diplomacy played an active role even before formal diplomatic relations were fully established.

Moreover, these initiatives were based on mutual exchange rather than unilateral interaction. For instance, the exchange of art historians between Yekaterinburg and Feldkirch contributed to enriching the cultural environments of both regions, highlighting the importance of regional centers in international cultural cooperation.

In 1993, Austria officially addressed the Government of Uzbekistan with a proposal to organize cultural events. "These included meetings with specialists, exhibitions of decorative and applied arts, graphic exhibitions, family exchange programs, and children's art exhibitions. Such initiatives illustrate the systematic and comprehensive nature of Austria's cultural diplomacy" [3;].

For Uzbekistan, as a newly independent state striving to enter the international arena, these programs were of great importance in presenting its national identity and rich cultural heritage.

Role of Intellectual and Cultural Figures:

"The activities of Chingiz Aitmatov are particularly noteworthy. In 1994, he served as the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to the European Community while residing in Luxembourg. His novel *The Mark of Cassandra* was translated into German and published in Zurich in 1994.

The presentation of the work took place in Vienna on September 13, attended by writers, scholars, diplomats, and a wide audience.

Chingiz Aytmatov was awarded the Austrian State Prize for Literature for 1993, a prestigious award granted annually to a single European writer. The award ceremony was held in Vienna on September 14" [4;].

These events demonstrate that cultural cooperation developed not only at the state level but also through individual intellectual figures, contributing to the integration of Central Asian literature into the European cultural space.

Cultural Cooperation with Switzerland:

The intensification of relations between Uzbekistan and Switzerland reflects the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's policy of openness, reforms, and constructive partnership. This policy has strengthened the country's international reputation and gained recognition within the global community.

"A significant example of cultural cooperation is the activity of the "Musavvir" Folk Applied Arts Association. Established in 1990, it brought together skilled artisans such as Raimberdi Matchonov, Jalil Hakimov, Ahmad Muzaffarov, Anvar Sattorova, and Mahkam Avloqulov. Their works were exhibited in Switzerland, France, Italy, and other countries" [5;].

These exhibitions played a crucial role in promoting Uzbek applied arts globally and introducing national handicrafts to international markets. The association also aimed to support overlooked artisans, increase production, and enhance artistic quality. Plans were made to send artisans abroad as part of cultural diplomacy and to establish Uzbek national craft shops and teahouses in foreign countries.

"The work of Muyassar Temirova represents another important contribution. Specializing in traditional gold embroidery, she created highly artistic textiles and garments depicting historical monuments such as the Ismail Samani Mausoleum and the Kalon Minaret. Her works were exhibited in numerous countries, including Switzerland, France, Germany, the USA, and Italy, receiving high recognition and awards" [6;].

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that cultural and artistic cooperation between Uzbekistan, Austria, and Switzerland began in the early 1990s and developed progressively. Initially emerging within the CIS framework, these relations evolved into a multifaceted system of bilateral cooperation.



While cooperation with Austria was primarily characterized by cultural diplomacy, exhibitions, and literary exchange, collaboration with Switzerland focused more on applied arts, handicrafts, and international exhibitions. Together, these partnerships facilitated Uzbekistan's integration into the European cultural space.

The activities of prominent figures such as Chingiz Aitmatov, along with the contributions of artisans and cultural organizations, played a vital role in promoting Uzbekistan's cultural heritage globally. Overall, cultural cooperation with Austria and Switzerland has become a key strategic factor in strengthening Uzbekistan's international cultural presence, promoting its national identity, and enhancing its global image. This historical experience continues to serve as a solid foundation for the further development of cultural diplomacy.

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